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TRUE DIMENSION OF NIXON

JOHN CHANCELLOR: In the Watergate cover-up trial today, the prosecution outlined what it claimed was the true dimension of Richard Nixon's role in the cover-up. Carl Stern has the story.

CARL STERN: Today was the first time the Special Prosecutor specifically named Richard Nixon as the head man of the plan to obstruct the FBI investigation of Watergate. Six days after Watergate, CIA official Vernon Walters was told, allegedly, of Mr. Nixon's direction to get acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray to curtail the investigation.

Prosecutor James Neal charged that Walters was a clear and direct agent of the former President. He said the instructions went from Nixon to Haldeman to Walters to Gray. Gray himself recounted that the ploy delayed the investigation more than two weeks, until Walters, who also testified, finally admitted to Gray it was all a ruse and said, "I'm not going to let those kids at the White House kick me around anymore."

It was the recordings of the President's instructions that forced Mr. Nixon from office last summer. Today the recordings were played for the first time publicly. The jury could hear the President telling H.R. Haldeman to summon the CIA top brass.

THE PRESIDENT: When you get these people in say, "Look, the problem in this will open the whole Bay of Pigs thing." They should call the FBI in and say that we wish for the country, "Don't go any further into this case, period."

Later, just before the meeting, another last-minute instruction?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't want them to get any ideas that our concern is political. I would just say, "Look, it's because of the Hunt involvement."

And then, an hour later, after Haldeman had met with the CIA officials, Haldeman reported to the President, "Walters is going to make a call to Gray. That's the way we put it. That's the way it was left."

For prosecutor Neal that seemed to wrap things up, his neatest

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Walters Recalls Move to Involve CIA in Cover-Up

By Barry Kalb
Star-News Staff Writer

Deputy CIA Director Vernon A. Walters today testified that former Nixon aides H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman attempted to involve the CIA in the FBI's Watergate investigation six days after the Watergate arrests.

Walter's testimony at the Watergate cover-up trial was in preparation for the playing of three June 23, 1972 tape recordings of conversations between Haldeman and then-President Richard M. Nixon — the recordings which triggered Nixon's resignation last August.

Haldeman and Ehrlichman are two of the five defendants in the trial.

WALTERS has told his story before, but not since the June 23 tapes were made public.

Walters said he and then-CIA director Richard Helms were summoned to the White House the morning of June 23 with Haldeman and Ehrlichman in Ehrlichman's White House office.

Walters said Haldeman began by saying the Watergate case was "making a lot of noise," that Democrats were trying to "maximize it," and that "the investigation was leading to some important people and it might get worse."

THE TRANSCRIPT of the first June 23 tape — which recorded a conversation held before the meeting with Helms and Walters — shows Nixon and Haldeman expressing concern that the FBI's investigation of some Nixon campaign checks which were routed through Mexico — and of another check which was not —

might lead to the Finance Committee to Re-elect the President.

The transcript shows that Nixon instructed Haldeman to direct the CIA to ask the FBI not to pursue the Mexican investigation further.

Walters said that at the meeting, Haldeman told him and Helms "It is the President's wish that Gen. Walters go to the acting director of the FBI and direct him that the pursuit of the FBI investigation in Mexico . . . might uncover some operations of the CIA."

HELMS REPLIED that he had spoken the previous day with acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III "and had told him (Gray) that the agency was not involved (in the Watergate bugging)," Walters testified.

Walters said, however, that Haldeman was not swayed by this remark, replying, "Nevertheless, it has been decided that Gen. Walters will go" to tell Gray that the FBI's investigation "may uncover some assets of the CIA."

Walters said the only part he could recall Ehrlichman's taking in the conversation was to say that Walters could call Gray from the White House, if he wanted.

Ehrlichman's lawyers have contended that Ehrlichman did not know the true purpose of the June 23 meeting, and was tricked into the cover-up by Nixon and Haldeman that day.

WALTERS also recounted conversations later that day with Gray, and in the following days with then-White House Counsel John W. Dean III.

Walters said that he met with Gray the afternoon of June 23 and told him that he "had been instructed by the White House to say that the FBI investigation in Mexico "could uncover some covert CIA assets for activities there."

He said he told Gray he was aware that Gray had spoken with Helms the previous day. However, Walters said, in view of his discussion with the White House, he told Gray that "since the five suspects have been arrested (at the Watergate), it would be better if the investigation tapered off there."

Walters said that after his meeting with Gray, he and Helms called in the CIA operatives responsible for operations in Mexico, to find out if the FBI investigation might jeopardize CIA activities there. He indicated their answer was that it would not.

IN CONVERSATIONS with Dean on June 26, 27 and 28, Walters said, Dean attempted to have Walters involve the CIA in the Watergate operation, even though Walters told him there was no such involvement. He said he finally dissuaded Dean.

On July 6, he said, he met with Gray and, apparently in response to a request by Gray, said he could not write a letter saying the FBI investigation was jeopardizing CIA activities in Mexico. "and if I was asked to do so, I would resign."